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Regional Security, Collective Security, and American Security

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Following is an address by John M. Poindexter, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, before the 1986 Armed Forces Day dinner sponsored by the National Defense Committee and the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce, Indianapolis, Indiana, May 16, 1986.

For a son of Indiana, it's a pleasure to speak here tonight. As we commemorate Armed Forces Day, I am pleased to address this audience in particular. I know that many of you have a keen interest in the national security issues I want to put before you.

U.S. Involvement in International Security

America has now had a leading role on the world stage for more than two generations. It is a role of which we can be proud. We have matched power with responsibility in a way that few others ever have. Yet, as our responsibilities have grown in the past half-century, we have constantly reraised those questions that, during our entire life as a nation, have dominated our debate on our relations with the rest of the world.

Perhaps the oldest of the questions that we Americans have debated is this: how—and how much—should we cooperate with other nations to maintain international security? How—and how much—should America engage in the affairs of the outside world? All of you here will recognize the long history of this issue. It is the same question that President Washington raised in his farewell address, when he warned his fellow citizens against "entangling alliances."

After World War II, of course, our national aversion to "entanglement" was fundamentally altered. Within 4 years of V-E Day, America made historic decisions on aid to Greece and Turkey, the Marshall Plan, and the North Atlantic alliance. We had come to consider our own security to be inseparable from that of Western Europe.

In the same fashion, we bound ourselves to Japan with a security treaty. After the invasion of South Korea, we kept armed forces of the United States stationed there to demonstrate our continuing readiness to defend that country. And every U.S. President since the founding of the State of Israel has reiterated our commitment to its security.

Commitments of this kind marked a revolution in America's foreign policy and in American history as a whole. Yet there has been much more controversy about the kind of role that America should have beyond these basic relationships. In particular, what should we do to help maintain the security and stability of unstable regions of the developing world? Our most intense—and debilitating—foreign policy debate of the past 40 years has turned on just such a question: the security—in fact, the national existence—of South Vietnam.

The Vietnam experience produced a difficult reexamination of our foreign policy. Yet Americans continue to believe—correctly—that many of our vital national interests can only be protected by cooperating with others. This is not simply an altruistic belief. By helping others in their defense, we contribute to our own. By joining their strength to ours, we move closer to our common goals. By preserving an open and growing world economy, we defend our own prosperity and freedoms.

Collective Security v. Global Unilateralism

I have begun my remarks by discussing "collective security" because lately the debate over this concept has been reopened—overseas, in the Congress, in the media, and elsewhere. You've probably been hearing that in the future America will—and, some say, probably should—"go it alone." Even some of the most consistent supporters of our alliance ties express concern, as Henry Kissinger did this week when he proposed that we move some of our longer range aircraft from Britain back home to the United States.

One of the newest buzzwords describing this apparent change in outlook is "global unilateralism." The phrase conjures up a truculent policy of acting now and asking questions later, of impatience with compromise, and of disregarding established relationships if they don't suit us as much as they once did. As one journalist has put it, "Being a superpower often means not having to say either please or sorry."

Obviously, the President's firm policies toward Libya have done much to revive this discussion. In announcing last month's military actions against Libyan-supported terrorism, the President did say that in dealing with this problem the United States would act "with others, if possible, and alone, if necessary." It was a strong statement that deserves considerable thought and attention.

Nevertheless, it seems to me that much of the recent analysis and commentary on this issue has been completely misplaced. "Going it alone" does not describe either the concepts or the conduct of the Reagan Administration.

Last week, as you know, the President returned from the Tokyo economic summit, where we discussed common problems, interests, and approaches with our key allies. The President believes it was a very successful meeting, the most successful of the six he has attended. The joint statements that resulted demonstrated what he had in mind when he wrote—in his message to Congress of 2 months ago, entitled "Freedom, Regional Security, and Global Peace"—that "the pursuit of American goals has always required cooperation with like-minded partners."

This is true, in part, because America's resources are limited. But it would be true at any level of resources. The most secure peace—the kind we seek—is one that is protected not by a distant superpower but by the efforts of free

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peoples working together on problems that affect them directly. To achieve such a goal, we need strong partners.

America wants to cooperate with others because that's what works—because that is the best way of protecting the regional peace and freedom that serve both our interests and theirs. What President Reagan has called the "democratic revolution" is at the heart of his commitment to collective security. Around the world we see that the ranks of those who share our broad interests are growing. This gives us confidence that together we can succeed.

The President's actions in Libya are no exception to the outlook I have described. Over the long run, they will be seen to have given the strongest and most convincing possible support to the principle of "collective security." Far from weakening the foundations of cooperation between America and others, they have, in fact, encouraged others to work with us. And the President's policies make it more credible that we will help them in the ways that count most to them.

Decisive action by the United States reassures others that we are ready, willing, able, and wise enough to defend vital interests under pressure. It is a crucial message to our friends. When they need help, they won't have to worry that America will wait to see which way the wind is blowing before deciding whether or not to help.

It should be clear that the Tokyo summit has already shown some of these positive effects. Publicly and privately, we are seeing more and more support for cooperative actions. The President has demonstrated leadership, and it is paying off.

The real issue, then, is not whether the United States has abandoned collective security. It has not. It cannot. Doing so would hurt our interests. But there is an important issue here that does need to be addressed. And that is: how can we make collective security work best today?

Making Collective Security Work

I want to take up this question in two ways.

First, by looking at the elements of the Reagan Administration's approach to "regional security," particularly to those security issues that lie beyond the core commitments of our foreign policy.

Second, and equally important, I want to suggest some of the questions other countries should be asking as they consider what kind of U.S. role in the world they would like to encourage. For, needless to say, our role is not decided by our own actions alone. What other countries do has a great influence on the kind of cooperation that America pursues with them.

Let me begin with an issue that has been in the headlines this week and last: the Administration's proposed delivery of additional air-to-air missiles and other military systems to improve Saudi Arabia's air-defense capabilities. This initiative reflects a goal that has been part of our national strategy since the late 1940s—to help friendly countries acquire the means to defend themselves.

Whether a friendly country can pay for the help or we have to provide some resources of our own, we reap a huge benefit from security assistance. Other nations' dependence on America is reduced if they are strong enough to meet threats from hostile neighbors. At the same time we build a firm foundation on which we can, if necessary, work with them to meet greater threats in the future. You may know that it costs our NATO ally, Turkey, only one-tenth as much a year to keep a well-equipped soldier in the field as it costs the United States. That's one reason President Reagan has called our investment in security assistance a true national security bargain.

In this light, charges that this Administration is "going it alone" seem especially ironic. Those who take a meat ax to our security assistance budget are making it far harder for us to meet common dangers through cooperation. As Secretary Shultz said earlier this week, there is a real, a dangerous world out there, and our capacity to conduct foreign policy cannot be treated as just another domestic program. Doing so, he said, would "threaten nothing less than the reversal of 40 years of constructive American leadership for peace and freedom." This is why national security spending must not be made to bear a disproportionate share of the burden of much-needed budget cutting.

Let us also recall that Saudi Arabia—which will, I should note, pay cash for every penny of the equipment it has requested—has a dangerous war going on right on its doorstep, between Iran and Iraq. Just two summers ago, the Saudi Air Force had to counter Iranian threats to shipping and oil facilities in the Persian Gulf, which remain vital to the free world's energy supply. When Saudi planes acted, American planes did not have to.

This war is again at a crucial stage. Violence could spill across the Persian Gulf again at any time. In the last month, there have been three further Iranian attacks on Saudi tankers in the gulf already. The closing of the gulf would "shock" the global economy. Oil prices would start to rise again.

So when the Congress acts to weaken our close cooperation with Saudi Arabia, which every President since F.D.R. has strongly supported, I believe that the members of the House and Senate ought to ask themselves some hard questions.

- *Who* is promoting a sound policy of collective security?
- *Who* is making it harder for the United States to contribute to the peace of the Middle East and Persian Gulf?
- *Who*, in short, are the real "global unilateralists?"

Congress has also tried to push us further toward unilateralism in refusing to provide aid to the brave Nicaraguans who are fighting Soviet- and Cuban-backed communism in Central America. When it refuses to apply the best means we have to pressure the communist government in Managua to negotiate, Congress ensures that no negotiated solution can be achieved which would meet the concerns of Nicaragua's neighbors and of the United States. That makes it more likely that, sometime in the future, the United States will have to act by itself—under far less favorable circumstances and at a far higher cost.

Promoting Negotiated Solutions

So the first key element of the President's approach to regional conflict is security assistance—helping those who share our interests and principles. And the second element involves the promotion of negotiated solutions, in Central America and elsewhere. Here, too, it is our belief that the most successful policy has to be built on the solid foundations of collective security.

Strong U.S. support for allies and friends means that they can have more confidence in pursuing any possible opportunities for peace. It also means that the Soviet Union and its clients cannot expect time to be on their side. They cannot comfort themselves with hopes that America will be distracted by other concerns and eventually forget its friends.

In other words, regional peacemaking is only possible if it rests on collective effort. The United States can hardly impose peace, and we cannot be its only supporter. We are, after all, generally not a direct participant in the talks among the warring parties. What we can do is try to contribute to an environment favorable to negotiation. We make this contribution in many ways.

In southern Africa, for example, we have worked to promote a regional diplomatic settlement involving Angola, Namibia, and South Africa. Recently, we saw a small step foward when South Africa, in response to an Angolan request, agreed to set a date for Namibian independence.

This is the kind of movement, I might add, that would be much harder

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to bring about if—as some have advocated—the U.S. policy were simply to break off all contacts with South Africa. Although many supporters of such a course might not like to think of it in this way, that would be "going it alone." It might be a satisfying symbol of how strongly we oppose apartheid, but it would make it harder for us to achieve our goals. It would make diplomatic progress harder to attain. It would make regional security more shaky.

To take another example, we believe that consistent U.S. backing for Pakistan is a prerequisite for progress in the talks on Afghanistan that are now taking place in Geneva under the aegis of the United Nations. There has been considerable speculation in the past several months about a possible change in Soviet policy leading to a withdrawal. We hope that this is true and certainly believe that an early withdrawal would serve Soviet interests well.

Unfortunately, we see little evidence that Moscow is moving in this direction. Soviet leaders claim a sincere desire to pull out of Afghanistan, and yet the war continues with increased ferocity and brutality. If the Soviets truly desire an end to the war, let them consider three steps that would do more to establish their true intentions than any expressions of sincerity.

First, let them announce a timeframe for withdrawal. There is no reason it should take more than 3–6 months.

Second, let them show that they understand the need to take the wishes of the Afghan people into account. This is the reason that President Reagan, in the regional initiative that he put forward at the United Nations last year, called for talks among the warring parties as the first step in resolving regional conflicts.

Third, let the Soviets commit themselves to respect fully the neutrality of Afghanistan in the future. There should be no search for pretexts to allow Soviet forces to return.

The Soviet Union, if it moves in this direction, can be sure that the United States will do nothing to stand in its way.

Economic Growth and Stability

The other elements of the Administration's approach to regional security have the same emphasis on collective measures that I have described above.

With respect to economic growth, the United States has taken the lead in multilateral efforts for coping with the debt problems of the developing world. Treasury Secretary Jim Baker's initiative brings together the public and private sectors of the world's strongest economies to share in helping debtor states to reignite growth. These problems are not purely economic in their impact: if Brazil and Argentina, for example, succeed in putting their economies back on the road to health, it will be a powerful boost to democracy throughout our hemisphere.

Similarly, the governments participating in the Tokyo summit have discussed the possible advantages of a "Middle East economic development plan." The drop in energy prices has given a substantial boost to the economies of most of our summit partners. Yet all retain a strong interest in the stability of the Middle East. We want to explore ways in which the seven summit nations might increase the resources set aside for this area. Working with the governments of the region, we would also hope to see private sector investment increase. The key will be to create a productive infrastructure and meaningful employment opportunities. Given the scope of the problem, a collective effort has much to be said for it.

Nuclear Proliferation and International Terrorism

I have spoken of many dimensions of collective regional security: the importance of democratic partners, the military safety that our friends need, the diplomatic processes that can break through a tangle of disputes, and the economic foundations of stable relations among nations.

Let me add two further dimensions, which cannot be ignored in this age of advanced weaponry and radical ideologies—nuclear proliferation and international terrorism.

Like the other elements of regional security that I have mentioned, slowing the spread of nuclear-weapons capabilities requires an effective multilateral effort. Because the technology and materials needed to manufacture nuclear weapons are widely available, we need agreement among all potential suppliers to regulate the flow of these items.

Similarly, we believe that only a multilateral approach can increase the incentives of potential nuclear powers to reject a nuclear course. To do this, our policy realistically addresses the insecurities that drive states to consider their nuclear options in the first place. With this problem in mind, we have encouraged a process of reconciliation among traditional regional adversaries and urged our friends to do likewise. We believe that regional reconciliation is an essential element of preventing an expansion of the "nuclear club."

As for terrorism, it continues to know fewer and fewer boundaries, either within or among regions. In the past 2 years, a growing number of terrorist attacks have been mounted in Latin America, often aimed at American citizens. Our allies face similar problems—for example, radical groups in Western Europe and continuing violence in Northern Ireland threaten all the people of the United Kingdom.

As part of our broader effort to combat terrorism, we and our partners agreed at the Tokyo summit to improve extradition procedures. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee has before it right now a proposed supplement to our extradition treaty with the United Kingdom. It would remove specific violent crimes from the so-called political offense exception. The Reagan Administration is strongly committed to ratification of this treaty amendment. Without it, America would remain a safe haven for terrorists from Northern Ireland.

We know we can't fight terrorism alone. We saw the value of Mrs. Thatcher's help when we had to act against Qadhafi, and we are seeking to extradite those involved in last year's *Achille Lauro* hijacking and the murder of Leon Klinghoffer. Strengthening the extradition treaty will help us beat the terrorists. It will increase our collective security.

The Need for International Cooperation

I have spoken at length about this Administration's approach to regional security, to demonstrate that it is nonsense to think that it is unilateralist. Our approach remains multilateral because we believe this is the most promising path. No one country has the resources, the answers, or the power to address all the issues of regional security. And it is also multifaceted because no single instrument of policy can capture the problem of regional security in its complexity.

These are issues that we continue to debate. Our history suggests that the debate will never end, and it should not. Nevertheless, I believe that there are elements of this debate that other countries should also take very seriously. Their own policies shape the environment in which we make our basic decisions about foreign policy. What they do determines how effectively we can work together. Because of this, our debate on the issues of regional security cannot be completely separated from theirs.

To take the most obvious recent example, it is hard for Americans to understand the attitude of many countries toward the problem of international terrorism. For all the progress the leaders made in their consultations in Tokyo, there are plainly some underlying, continuing differences in outlook among our nations. Our people were heartened

when Prime Minister Thatcher said that "to overcome the threat [of international terrorism] is in the vital interest of all countries founded on freedom and the rule of law"; and when she said: "It was inconceivable to me that we should refuse American aircraft and pilots the right to defend their own people."

In all frankness, however, we were puzzled and disappointed at the number who objected to her statements. We were troubled by those who said that terrorism is something we have to live with; that opposing it will only make matters worse; that it is, in the end, merely a peculiar American obsession.

It is an American obsession, but only in this sense: we believe it threatens international peace and security and the ability of free, like-minded countries to work together.

These differences require careful thought on both sides of the Atlantic. American policy remains firmly multilateral, firmly committed to cooperation with others who share our interests. But cooperation and collective security don't happen automatically. And if allies think that the worst thing that could happen is that American policy would become unilateralist, they are almost certainly mistaken.

An American unilateralist policy would, after all, be one that continued to defend our allies' interests and behind which they could hide—contributing little but benefiting all the same. The real alternative direction for American policy is not unilateralism, but isolationism—that is, increased indifference to our friends' interests.

This Administration would deplore such a turn. We believe that America also would suffer from it. But we and our friends should not expect to go too long without resolving disagreements on regional security issues. If we do, we will doubtless pay the price of greater misunderstanding of what our broad common interests really are. This will put us at odds on more issues than just terrorism. Our friends who do not want this to happen any more than we do must begin to ask how they can prevent it from occurring.

But it is not only our friends in Western Europe and East Asia that should ask what kind of American role in the world they want to encourage.

There are other problems that we regard as absolutely central in shaping an international environment in which we can pursue a policy of true collective security. Yet sometimes others see these differently.

Let me offer two examples. To our way of thinking, working against nuclear proliferation is one key to preserving a stable international setting in which we can cooperate with those who share our interests. The prospect of additional countries acquiring nuclear weapons threatens our ability to help them and to have mutually beneficial relationships with them.

As is the case with terrorism, concern with this problem is not an American obsession or something that we can't quite shake. It is a fact of life. In opposing the spread of nuclear weapons, we are seeking to preserve relationships that we value and that we consider mutually beneficial. Nations that expect to be our partners must reckon with this resolve.

A second example—less obvious, perhaps—is that of economic organization. Before his departure for Asia, the President spoke of the "winds of freedom." He believes these "winds"—forces that strengthen free institutions—carry a message about the prosperity that is available to any nation that lets loose the power of individual initiative. He has urged others to study this message and to adopt policies that favor free enterprise.

This is the President's strong personal conviction; but it is much more than that. It is a judgment about the future. It is very possible that increasingly the world will be divided into those nations that have gained the benefits of freedom—of economic, political, and personal freedom—and those that have not. We will almost certainly find it far easier to cooperate with those that have.

Naturally, we encourage other governments to develop a favorable climate for investment and trade because this helps promote economic development and growth. Yet it is also because, over the long term, our political relations will also benefit and the regional stability in which such relationships can thrive will be best protected.

Conclusion

I have spoken this evening of America's friends and of our need to cooperate in promoting regional security. Let me close with a comment about America's adversaries. Nothing has taken a greater toll on U.S.-Soviet relations than Soviet policies aimed at exploiting instability in the developing world. By the same token, nothing can do more to make our overall competition safer and more manageable than policies—ours and our allies'—that both reduce this instability and counter attempts to exploit it.

An American policy of collective security provides our best guarantee of safety. We believe our friends and allies—and our Congress—will agree.■

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